

VII. CLAIMS

WHAT IS CLAIMED IS:

1. A method of facilitating operations of a plurality of Independent Retailers ("IR's"), said method comprising:
 - 5 (a) communicating over a network from a service bureau or a plurality of headquarters of a chain of retail stores to their respective IR's;
 - (b) displaying to said IR's a plurality of services for said IR's, for said IR's to select at least one service, wherein said services comprise procurement;
 - 10 (c) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to its respective headquarters or a service bureau showing said at least one selected service from said at least one store; and
 - (d) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected service.
2. The method of claim 1, wherein said plurality of services for said IR's further comprises transaction services, communities services, brand deployment services, education support services, business operating systems services, and customer support services.
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3. The method of claim 1, further comprising steps for entering real-time communications between any of said IR's and a customer service representative of said service or a service bureau, and wherein said steps for communication can be entered into during any step of said method.
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4. The method of claim 1, wherein said network comprises a client-server environment comprising the Internet, an extranet, a wide area network, a metropolitan area network, and mixtures thereof.
5. The method of claim 2, wherein said transaction services comprises:
 - 5 (a) displaying a plurality of transaction services comprising automatic replenishment, order history, and pricing, for said IR's to select at least one transaction service;
 - 10 (b) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to said headquarters showing said at least one selected transaction service from said at least one store; and
 - (c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected transaction service.
6. The method of claim 2, wherein said communities services comprises:
 - 15 (a) displaying a plurality of communities services comprising newsgroups, chat rooms, clubs, and message boards, for said IR's to select at least one communities service;
 - (b) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to said headquarters or service bureau showing said at least one selected communities service from said at least one store; and
 - 20 (c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected communities service.
7. The method of claim 2, wherein said brand deployment services comprises:

- (a) displaying a plurality of brand deployment services comprising supplying database access to corporate guidelines and procedures, for said IR's to select at least one brand deployment service;

5 (b) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to said headquarters showing said at least one selected brand deployment service from said at least one store; and

- (c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected brand deployment service.

10 8. The method of claim 2, wherein said education support services comprises:

- (a) displaying a plurality of education support services comprising supplying training materials, for said IR's to select at least one education support service;

15 (b) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to said headquarters showing said at least one selected education support service from said at least one store; and

- (c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected education support service.

20 9. The method of claim 2, wherein said operations support services comprises:

- (a) displaying a plurality of operations support services comprising uniform ordering services, for said IR's to select at least one operations support service;

(b) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to said headquarters showing said at least one selected operations support service from said at least one store; and

(c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected operations support service.

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10. The method of claim 2, wherein said customer support services comprises:

(a) displaying a plurality of customer support services comprising help desk services, transaction history services, trouble-shooting services, and system training services, for said IR's to select at least one customer support service;

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(b) receiving a message showing said at least one selected customer support service from said IR's; and

(c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected customer support service.

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11. The method of claim 1, wherein said network comprises a client-server environment comprising the Internet, an extranet, a wide area network, a metropolitan area network, and mixtures thereof.

12. A method of managing brand promotion deployment for a plurality of chains of IR's, said method comprising:

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(a) entering into volume discount promotion agreements between merchandise suppliers and each headquarters for a chain of IR's;

(b) communicating said volume discounts agreements over a network from each of said headquarters to its corresponding IR's, wherein

said IR's may make purchases under said volume discounts agreements;

 (c) selecting and ordering merchandise by at least one of said IR's pursuant to at least one of said volume discounts agreements; and

5 (d) communicating over said network said selected purchases of said IR's to the corresponding merchandise supplier or its respective headquarters, for fulfillment of said purchase.

 13. The method of claim 12, wherein said network comprises a client-server environment comprising the Internet, an extranet, a wide area network, a metropolitan area network, and mixtures thereof.

10 14. A method for a plurality of retail chains to manage brand promotions defined each chain's respective headquarters, comprising:

 (a) under control of a client system each of the store's:

 (1) displaying information identifying an item in a brand promotion; and

15 (2) wherein said information is served up from a server system of the corresponding headquarters' of said store;

 (b) sending a request to order said item to a server system of a supplier of the item;

20 (c) under control of said server system of a supplier:

 (1) receiving the request;

 (2) generating an order to purchase the requested item; and

(3) fulfilling the generated order to complete purchase of the item.

15. A system for managing brand promotion deployment for a plurality of chains of IR's, said system comprising:

5 (a) a server component for serving over a network a plurality of brand promotions from a plurality of headquarters of chains of IR's to their respective IR's;

10 (b) a client component for receiving from said server component said plurality of brand promotions and for displaying said brand promotions, and for recognizing a user's selection of specific brand promotions, and for communicating over said network to a corresponding supplier the selected brand promotions and the identity of the selecting store; and

15 (c) wherein said system is configured to permit any of said IR's to view and select a plurality of brand promotions on a recurring or irregular basis, that selection is communicated to a supplier which fulfills said brand promotion.

16. The system of claim 15, further comprising means for entering real-time communications between any of said IR's and a customer service representative of said headquarters, and wherein said means for communication is configured to be enabled during use of the system.

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17. The system of claim 15, wherein said network comprises a client-server environment comprising the Internet, an extranet, a wide area network, a metropolitan area network, and mixtures thereof.

18. A system for managing a plurality of chains of IR's, said system comprising:

- (a) communication means for communicating over a network from a plurality of headquarters of a chain of IR's to a plurality of said IR's;
- (b) displaying means for displaying to said IR's a plurality of services for said IR's, and configured to allow said IR's to select at least one service, wherein said services comprise promotion ordering;
- (c) receiving means for receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to each respective headquarters showing said at least one selected service from said at least one store; and
- (d) server means for serving up to said IR's said at least one selected service.

19. The system of claim 18, wherein said plurality of services for said IR's further comprises transaction services, communities services, brand deployment services, education support services, operations support services, and customer support services.

20. The system of claim 19, wherein said transaction services comprises:

- (a) displaying a plurality of transaction services comprising automatic replenishment, order history, and pricing, for said IR's to select at least one transaction service;
- (b) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to said headquarters showing said at least one selected transaction service from said at least one store; and

(c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected transaction service.

21. The system of claim 19, wherein said communities services comprises:

5 (a) displaying a plurality of communities services comprising newsgroups, chat rooms, clubs, and message boards, for said IR's to select at least one communities service;

 (b) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to said headquarters showing said at least one selected communities service from said at least one store; and

10 (c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected communities service.

22. The system of claim 19, wherein said brand deployment services comprises:

15 (a) displaying a plurality of brand deployment services comprising supplying database access to corporate guidelines and procedures, for said IR's to select at least one brand deployment service;

 (b) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to said headquarters showing said at least one selected brand deployment service from said at least one store; and

20 (c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected brand deployment service.

23. The system of claim 19, wherein said education support services comprises:

- (a) displaying a plurality of education support services comprising supplying training materials, for said IR's to select at least one education support service;
- 5 (b) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to said headquarters showing said at least one selected education support service from said at least one store; and
- (c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected education support service.

24. The system of claim 19, wherein said operations support services
10 comprises:

- (a) displaying a plurality of operations support services comprising uniform ordering services, for said IR's to select at least one operations support service;
- 15 (b) receiving over said network a message from at least one of said IR's to said headquarters showing said at least one selected operations support service from said at least one store; and
- (c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected operations support service.

25. The system of claim 19, wherein said customer support services
20 comprises:

- (a) displaying a plurality of customer support services comprising help desk services, transaction history services, trouble-shooting services, and system training services, for said IR's to select at least one customer support service;

- (b) receiving a message showing said at least one selected customer support service from said IR's; and
- (c) serving up to said IR's said at least one selected customer support service.

5 26. The system of claim 18, wherein said network comprises a client-server environment comprising the Internet, an extranet, a wide area network, a metropolitan area network, and mixtures thereof.

27. A system of managing brand promotion deployment for a plurality of chains of IR's, said system comprising:

10 (a) volume discount promotion agreements between merchandise suppliers and each headquarters for a chain of IR's;

 (b) communication means for communicating said volume discounts agreements over a network from each of said headquarters to a plurality of IR's, wherein said IR's may make purchases under said volume discounts agreements;

15 (c) selection means for selecting and ordering merchandise by at least one of said IR's pursuant to at least one of said volume discounts agreements; and

 (d) communication means for communicating over said network said selected purchases of said IR's to the corresponding merchandise supplier, for fulfillment of said purchase.

20 28. The system of claim 27, wherein said network comprises a client-server environment comprising the Internet, an extranet, a wide area network, a metropolitan area network, and mixtures thereof.

29. A system for a plurality of retail chain store to manage brand promotions defined by the store's headquarters, comprising:

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(a) a server system of a plurality of headquarters' of a plurality of retail chain stores configured for serving up information identifying an item in a brand promotion;

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(b) a client system of each of said retail chain store's configured:

(1) for receiving, parsing, and rendering said information identifying an item in a brand promotion from said server system of the headquarters'; and

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(2) for selecting at least one of said items and sending a request to order said items to a server system of a supplier of the item;

(c) a server system of a plurality of suppliers configured:

(1) for receiving the request;

(2) for generating an order to purchase the requested item; and

(3) for fulfilling the generated order to complete purchase of the item.